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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000157

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HOW THE 731 COALITION LOST THE SOUTH

REF: BASRAH 146

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,
Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Summary: On December 26, the Basrah Regional Coordinator met with Gali Najm Muter, the Iraqi National Accord (731) representative in Basrah. Gali attributed the poor showing of 731 in Basrah and the other southern provinces in the December 15 election to intimidation campaigns run by the Unified Iraqi Coalition (555) and election fraud. He urged the REO to come up with funds to counter "Iranian influence" in the south. The real reason why voters in the southern provinces voted for 555 over 731 was most likely because they believed that the 731 list's political parties had incompatible platforms. End Summary.

Shocked at the Results

2. (C) On December 26, the Basrah Regional Coordinator met with Gali Najm Muter, the Iraqi National Accord (731 List) representative in Basrah and discussed the results of the December 15 election, in which Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National Accord (731) party won only two of Basrah's sixteen seats in the National Assembly. Gali said that he and his party were "shocked" at the results, and that prior to the election he believed that 731 would win five or more seats. The Iraqi National Accord party had been active in Basrah for over two years, he said, and had four seats on the Basrah Provincial Council. "We were doing just fine until December 15," he said.

Why 731 Lost

3. (C) Gali said that the intimidation campaigns run by 555 opponents prior to the election had impacted his party's ability to campaign effectively (see reftel). Posters had been the primary way that most political parties in Basrah campaigned for the election, and many of 731's posters were torn down in the period before the election. Moreover, several people in Basrah were shot and killed while hanging up 731 posters, resulting in people being afraid to campaign.

4. (C) Fraud and illegal campaigning on election day also affected the outcome of the vote, according to Gali. He said that he had personally observed campaigning for 555 going on near polling centers in Basrah and knew people who were able to vote multiple times. He said his party had filed over 500 complaints with the Basrah and Baghdad offices of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq over illegal campaigning activity and voter fraud. Many demonstrations would take place in Baghdad and Basrah in reaction to perceived election fraud and illegal campaigning activity by 555, he predicted.

5. (C) Gali acknowledged that internal divisions in the 731 coalition could have played a role in 731's poor election results. In particular, he described the Iraqi Communist Party (17) and Al Qasimy Democratic Assembly (41) as "unpopular" in Basrah. He had contacted Allawi prior to the elections and advised him that these parties would lose them votes in the south. (Comment: The Iraqi Communist Party, which was founded in opposition to Saddam's regime, is seen as being intrinsically opposed to Al Qasimy Democratic Assembly, which has a Ba'athist foundation. The presence of these two parties in the same coalition was perceived by voters in the south to be a sell-out by both in order to win votes. End comment.)

6. (C) In the end, Gali said that 731 could not realistically hope to form a coalition with other lists that would enable them to acquire more seats than 555, and he recognized that 555 would be the winner of the majority of National Assembly seats. When asked if he believed that 731 would be able to cooperate with 555, he answered philosophically, "Nothing is impossible in politics."

Iranian Influence Threatens Iraqi Sovereignty

7. (C) Gali went on to urge the U.S. Government to take an active stance against "Iranian influence," the encroachment of

Islamic religious extremism into politics and society, in the southern provinces. He said that extremists were using religion as a "veil" to hide their real objectives - personal gain and power over Iraqi affairs. Iranian agents and extremists were spreading their influence through well-financed welfare programs targeting populations that were open to persuasion because of the years of poverty and devastation they experienced under Saddam's regime. In the same way that the United States rebuilt Japan and Germany after World War II, Gali said, it should rebuild Iraq and provide a counter force to religious extremism coming from Iran. He suggested that the U.S. Government provide funds to an organization or NGO headed by his party that would "educate" the populace by teaching patriotism and democracy and explaining the role of the United States in helping the reconstruction of Iraq.

"Iraqi Unity" Strategy Backfires

18. (C) Comment: Gali is a well-respected member of the Basrah Provincial Council and has won support among the religious Shia population in Basrah for the secular 731 list because he himself is a "seyyid," or descendent of the prophet. His dismay at 731's poor showing in the election was sincere and heartfelt, but the reasons for this probably have more to do with the internal divisions in his party than he wanted to admit. Intimidation campaigns and electoral fraud may have impacted the vote to some degree, but the real reason why voters in the southern provinces voted for 555 over 731 is most likely because the 731 list included parties with widely divergent political philosophies. Although Allawi himself is a popular figure in the south, his attempt at forming a coalition with diametrically opposed political parties lost critical support for the 731 list. End comment.

GROSS